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# Exploring ‘What’s Good about Security’: Politics of Security during the Dissolution of Yugoslavia

Ali Bilgic

*In the last decade, students of Critical Security Studies (CSS) have been increasingly studying and understanding the concept of security in negative terms. The way they choose to analyse security instils a one-sided understanding, which revolves around totalizing the material and ideational power of the state. This paper aims to discuss how students of CSS can avoid essentializing the meaning of security by extending its analytical scope beyond security professionalism and state-centrism. It will be argued that it is possible to inquire ‘what is good about security’ by examining the experiences of the most victimized through a study of the pluralism of politics of security. The argument will be illustrated through a discussion of ideas and practices of the Yugoslav anti-war feminist movement between 1989 and 1994.*

In a panel convened at the 2012 International Studies Association Conference (ISA) as a response to the increasing association of the concept of security with negative political ideas and practices (within the Critical Security Studies (CSS) literature),<sup>1</sup> the panellists commonly resisted the tendency to understand security in negative terms: security is predominantly about construction of self/other dichotomies, exclusion and extermination of threats, control of societies and restriction of freedoms. In contrast, the panellists sought answers to the question ‘what’s good about security?’ Can security also be about freedoms, transcending identity dichotomies, having empathy towards others?<sup>2</sup> In this analysis, it will be argued that if students of CSS seek to explore ‘what’s good about security’, they can study the pluralism of the politics of security by extending their analytical scope beyond *security professionalism* and *state-centrism*.

Instead of essentialization of the meaning of security (be it *necessarily* ‘bad’ or ‘good’), security can be understood as a politically constructed concept. This entails that what security means and how it can be achieved are derived from different and sometimes conflicting political ideas.<sup>3</sup> This is because political actors have different conceptions about which values should be protected and how they can be protected in the political community they envisage. In other words, security is derived from

politics<sup>4</sup> and the role of the security analyst is to explore the contestations within the politics of security, rather than confining security to essentialist conceptualizations. The politics of security comprises 'the role of representations of security in encouraging sets of policy responses, legitimating the role of particular actors or indeed constituting political communities in particular ways'.<sup>5</sup> It is a pluralistic area where a myriad of actors make competitive claims about the security–identity nexus.<sup>6</sup> Ideas about what security means, for whom security can be sought and how security can be achieved are constitutive to ideas about how individual and collective identities are constructed. As will be illustrated in the case of the anti-war feminist movements in the former Yugoslavian political arena, actors present conflicting claims about the security–identity nexus. Studying these contending claims can open new avenues to thinking about security.

The discussion starts with problematizing how the Societal Security Dilemma (SSD) literature analyses the Yugoslav civil war. Three assumptions in this literature about the security–identity nexus will be highlighted: (a) security is a scarce value/commodity; (b) there is a unidirectional relationship between identity and security; (c) identity difference is a source of insecurity. However, this approach could not examine the contestations within the politics of security during the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Second, it will be argued that two choices (security professionalism and state-centrism), which are also commonly evident in contemporary CSS, underline these assumptions. Finally, Yugoslav anti-war feminist movements' ideas about security and identity will be studied in order to explore the claims of these political movements concerning the security–identity nexus. Through studying how these movements explain the civil war, reflect on their insecurities and propose alternative security policies, it is possible to explore 'what's good about security' through examining the pluralism of the politics of security.

### **How is the Security–Identity Nexus Studied in the Societal Security Dilemma?**

In the SSD literature, different and inherently dichotomist identities are considered to be sources of fear and uncertainty between societies under the condition of anarchy created by the dissolution of multinational states. Elites belonging to different ethnic groups manipulate these identity differences and provoke ethnic conflict. During the early stages of SSD theorizing, the issue of identity difference as a source of insecurity between societies was reduced to elite manipulation of ethno-religious differences under the condition of crippling central Yugoslav state authority. Adopting the neo-realist understanding of security at societal level, self-centric political units (monolithic societies) pursue security for their ethnic groups by provoking insecurity for other ethnic groups within the anarchy-like structure. In other words, limited by a neo-realist logic, these works did not extensively study how ideas about security and identity interact and how this interaction leads to power spiralling and, eventually, ethnic war.<sup>7</sup>

Going beyond the neo-realist approach, Paul Roe was the first CSS scholar to study the identity–security nexus through integrating the Copenhagen School's securitization theory into SSD.<sup>8</sup> According to his line of thinking, there are different

ethnic groups whose differences are securitized (meaning, presented as an existential threat to the collective ethnic identity). The securitizing processes lead to spiralling, which results in ethnic conflict. Roe clearly states that the significant difference from the (early) Copenhagen School's approach is that rhetoric is not enough to trigger security dilemmas, but 'if rhetoric comes hand in hand with harmful policies, then collective consciousness, and with it group identity, may indeed be observed as ontologically insecure'.<sup>9</sup> Apart from this minor twist, Roe adopts the Copenhagen School's identity conceptualization: although it is constructed, identity can be fixed (temporarily) for the sake of conducting a security analysis.

In brief, the SSD approach in CSS argues that as a result of securitization, different (fixed, although temporarily) identities lead to insecurity. Its analysis of the security–identity nexus rests on three assumptions/conclusions about the nexus: (a) security is a scarce value/commodity in an anarchic structure (as in dissolving Yugoslavia); (b) there is a unidirectional relationship between identity and security; (c) identity difference is a source of insecurity. How accurate is this representation? A closer examination of the former Yugoslavian political structure by area specialists points at complex security–identity politics operating during the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Questioning the explanatory power of the 'security dilemma' for the ostensibly homogenous ethnic groups in former Yugoslavia, Sumantra Bose rightfully states:

But where did the security dilemma itself spring from? And how did it suddenly acquire such acute proportions? In non-scientific language, how was it possible for erstwhile neighbours, workplace colleagues, friends, even lovers belonging to 'different' communities to come to regard the other's very existence in the same locality as a mortal threat to themselves ... The security dilemma fetishists are blind to the possibility ... that their crucial explanatory variable is itself a puzzle in need of an explanation.<sup>10</sup>

Her argument is that the increasing possibility of partition of multi-ethnic/religious societies along the ostensible mono-ethno/religious lines triggered a security dilemma situation, not the other way around.<sup>11</sup> I have elsewhere argued that the security notion which is based on othering different ethnic groups, and on exclusion and termination of the 'different' generated a popular perception that homogenous ethnic groups are more secure.<sup>12</sup> The idea of partition went hand in hand with this type of security notion, which aims to homogenize ethnic groups. Another strong criticism comes from Susan Woodward, who argues that economic discrepancies emerged in the process of transformation towards a capitalist economy within and between Yugoslav states. The rapid development policies of the Yugoslav central government and subsequent state reactions to them had a major role in the civil war.<sup>13</sup> Rejecting Western academia's assumption of dissolution due to hostility among homogenous ethnic societies, Peter Gowan argues that there was considerable societal support to keeping Yugoslavia together, although elites formulated their political interests in line with transition to capitalism.<sup>14</sup> Western academia's adherence to ethno-nationalism in Yugoslavia 'alludes to an atemporal depoliticized image of the Balkans; nationalism is perceived as the quintessential feature of the

Balkan condition'.<sup>15</sup> In fact, there were many different actors with different political claims about how identities should be constituted. Their security understandings were different to the ethno-nationalist approach, which has been extensively studied in the SSD literature in particular. They, for example, feminists, imagined a different Yugoslavia.

In the final analysis, the security–identity relationship is more complex than assumed by the SSD scholars (both neo-realist and CSS versions). They tend to disregard how political actors' ideas and practices of security (re)constructed ethnic boundaries between groups with incommensurable security needs. Political actors' normative claims about how the collective identity of the social group should be constructed are not included in their security analysis. This generates an analytical setback, as these normative claims are also political claims about what should be secured. In addition, their analytical focus on state-level political actors but not actually on the *society* itself, results in a presentation of social groups as monolithic entities. However, as will be shown below, this was hardly the case in former Yugoslavia. The exclusion of multiple political actors from the security analysis hinders the possibility of exploring alternative approaches to security. Multiple political and economic factors interact with the politics of security in the process of dissolution. As will be shown below, alternative security notions with alternative identity visions were present in the pluralist politics of security in former Yugoslavia.

### Studying the Politics of Security, Exploring what's Good about Security<sup>16</sup>

The type of security analysis adopted by the SSD scholars is in fact common in some sectors of contemporary CSS (namely, the securitization approach and the security-as-risk approach) in general. In the last decade, what many students of CSS have been increasingly studying and understanding is a concept of security in negative terms, something to be avoided. For the securitization approach, when an issue is securitized (verbally and practically), normal political processes are abandoned in order to counter the threat.<sup>17</sup> When security is studied from the perspective of risk and governmentality for addressing risks, the concept is generally understood as a political tool to construct and oppress 'the self' against 'the threatening other'.<sup>18</sup> In this way, the latter critical approaches problematize the unidirectional relationship between identity and security, albeit to a limited extent. Notwithstanding their extensive contributions to problematizing a particular understanding of security, the way they choose to analyse security does not sufficiently reflect the pluralism of the politics of security with multiple actors, and their interests. Consequently, it instils a one-sided understanding of security, which revolves around the totalizing material and ideational power of 'the cold monster' state, governing communities through doing security, excluding and destroying what is presented as the different, 'the other'. This problem stems from two choices.

The first choice, associated with some critical approaches, is *security professionalism*. When we look at security analyses derived from the SSD approach and the late Copenhagen School,<sup>19</sup> as well as the risk approach<sup>20</sup> and the governmentality approach,<sup>21</sup> we can examine how security professionals (including policymakers such as

the Home Secretary and individuals working for subcontracted private security companies) shape the politics of security through their discursive and non-discursive performances. These studies rightly and extensively problematize these actions. However, they also adopt security professionalism, which refers to the idea that individuals who have the necessary technical information and knowledge can *exclusively* talk about and do security. These individuals are either affiliated with or directly work for states or organizations that provide information to states (such as FRONTEX, which conducts risk analysis for member states of the European Union (EU) in the area of irregular migration). What they say and what they do are studied through the assumption that they constitute the only political group in society that is entitled to talk about security, and others do not exist in this political arena.<sup>22</sup> For example, civil society actors challenging exclusionary security practices are not considered as 'security professionals' and, therefore, are silenced in the security analysis.

The second choice is state-centrism. Whether security is understood as a speech act, or articulated as a risk, or a way of governance to form subjectivities, both conceptual discussions and empirical research on contemporary critical approaches generally focus on the state and individuals affiliated with states (policymakers, bureaucrats, law enforcement agencies).<sup>23</sup> Sometimes, by using the language of existential threat and danger, or using the discourse of 'risk', or by employing policies which target the bodies of human beings, state institutions continuously appear as the arena where the game of security is played. The state is conceptualized as an institution that defines what security and insecurity is and how it should be pursued, by generally normalizing and perpetuating the state of exception, defined in the Agambenian sense. Many works following from critical approaches have convincingly problematized how a particular security discourse and practice totalize individuals and groups and draw the boundaries of self and other. However, 'adopting a state-centric approach in studying security may end up reinforcing statism by way of rendering invisible other potential referents and agents of security'.<sup>24</sup> As the state-centric approach to security is accepted as *the* approach to security, without paying analytical attention to alternative political actors, the concept of security is increasingly associated with exceptionalism and danger; with routinized practices of security professionals to manage 'risk in order to discipline the future';<sup>25</sup> and with exclusion and oppression of 'the other' for the sake securing 'the self'.

It must be noted that there are contending approaches within CSS resisting these two choices. Emancipatory security theory and some feminist approaches to security are attempts to politicize the concept by reflecting upon the pluralism of the politics of security. In relation to the former, McDonald introduces the ideas of civil society and political parties, which were previously marginalized, in Brasilia with reference to the protection of Amazon forests. These actors do not separate the security of the Amazon and that of the people. Instead, they construct a Brazilian identity that promotes human and environmental rights jointly.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, in relation to irregular migration in Europe, Bilgic draws the practices of some civil society actors who try to build trust between irregular migrants and EU citizens as a way to pursuing security for both groups.<sup>27</sup> Some feminist scholars examine how feminist movements challenge the exclusionary notions and practices of security engendered through a coalition of nationalism, militarism and patriarchy in different political contexts.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, both emancipatory and feminist approaches reject the limitations imposed on CSS by re-invoking state-centrism and security professionalism through opening the security analysis to alternatives: those who are silenced and marginalized. They also facilitate a new understanding to the study of the identity–security nexus.

In a recent study, McDonald explicitly draws a link between identities and notions of security. For him, 'representations of identity centre around questions of who we are and what we value, but also suggest a particular community who they might need protection from, and what means are available to protect or advance security'.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Peter Burgess argues that:

security and insecurity are implicitly connected to what we value, an expression of a value constellation that expresses a certain perspective on life, of individual and collective anxieties and aspirations, of expectations about what to sacrifice and what is worth preserving ... It involves people who value things and who need certain things as a means to survive.<sup>30</sup>

In other words, identities (both individual and communal) consist of particular values (both material and immaterial) that define who we are and what our interests are, while also sometimes defining the threatening 'others'. What needs to be secured and how it needs to be secured exist in a mutually constitutive relationship between notions of security. When political actors promote notions of security that are alternative to each other, they also make competing claims about how individual and communal identities should be (re)constructed.

Beyond state-centrism and security professionalism associated with the state, there lies an opportunity to examine what kinds of stories alternative political actors tell about security and identity. It becomes possible to see that different identities can be a source of security, which is not necessarily a scarce value/commodity. In the politics of security, different political actors make different (sometimes conflicting) claims about what we should value, and express clashing perspectives on life, on individual and collective anxieties and aspirations. They have different ideas about what is worth preserving. When political actors make claims about what is worth securing, they also make claims about individual and collective identities. Their stories compete to construct a particular structure of meaning 'from which individuals draw to enact identity'.<sup>31</sup> In former Yugoslavia, governmental actors told stories about what 'ethnic groups' should value and how these elements should be protected. Through these discursive and also non-discursive practices, collective identities were constructed and reconstructed along ethnic lines. David Campbell successfully shows how the narratives of security dominating the Yugoslavian dissolution 'ethnize' politics and justify violent security practices. However, his security analysis also does not sufficiently account for alternative security narratives employed by some civil society organizations.<sup>32</sup> This is one dimension of the politics of security studied by the SSD approach. However, if we go beyond state-centrism and security professionalism to explore the plurality of the politics of security, we can analyse alternative stories about what we should value, how we should live and who we should be, both individually and collectively.



### Anti-war Feminist Movements in Former Yugoslavia

According to the aforementioned SSD literature, different ethnic identities (securitized by the nationalist elite) pose a security dilemma for societies, which can evolve into inter-ethnic group conflict. According to this line of thinking, societies in former Yugoslavia were conceptualized along ethnic lines and presented as monolithic structures. This has been the general understanding of the dissolution of Yugoslavia not only in Western academia, but also in the media. However, Cynthia Cockburn's words point at a different perspective: 'while the world's media tended to represent ethnicity as the cause of the Balkan Wars, Yugoslavs such as the Belgrade feminists, on the contrary, saw renewed ethnic identities as a goal of the war-makers, a desired outcome of the wars'.<sup>33</sup> In other words, political elites associated with Yugoslav states, who were supposedly entitled to talk about security, in reality told societies what to value and what was worth securing: their 'natural' blood, historical culture, pure language. Through this discursive practice, Yugoslavian society was divided along ethnic lines where ethnic groups were presented and constructed as threatening 'others'.

If we go beyond state-centrism and security professionalism to explore the plurality of the politics of security in former Yugoslavia, and if we expand our analytical focus to include alternative political actors who also make claims about what is worth securing, it is possible to see that different identities are not necessarily a source of insecurity, since security is not necessarily a scarce good. In what follows, I will illustrate how anti-war feminist movements understood ethnicity and difference, security and insecurity, through discussing their arguments about what to value and to protect as women and as Yugoslavians.

Anti-war feminist movements in former Yugoslavia have been studied by feminist approaches in sociology and political science.<sup>34</sup> In the discipline of International Relations, feminist security scholars have also studied these movements and their ideas.<sup>35</sup> I have chosen the anti-war feminist movements in former Yugoslavia as a case to explore 'what's good about security' by moving beyond state-centrism and security professionalism. By looking at how feminists resisted the identity imposed on them, it will be possible to examine how they challenged the collective ethnic identities constructed by state-level political elites. Their victimhood, generated by the nationalist security–identity nexus, was also the source of ideas about what security and identity meant for them. 'What's good about security' will be sought in these ideas.

#### *Feminist Analysis of the Causes of the Civil War in Yugoslavia*

Unlike the approach dominating the SSD, feminists claim that ethnic identities are not the reason of the war. Instead, they emphasize the goal of the nationalist elites and intelligentsia, who had close relations with decision-makers. In order to achieve this objective, nationalist elites embarked upon an identity construction process. Croatian feminist Stasa Zajovic called this 'cultural cleansing'. For example, in 1990 the 'holy' remnants of the medieval Serbian kings were taken on a tour through all the territories populated by Serbs, especially in Bosnia, in order to instigate revenge and reinforce the idea that 'Serbian lands are those where Serbian graves are found'.<sup>36</sup>



All around Yugoslavia cities names were changed, and 'foreign' words were identified and replaced.

These discursive and non-discursive practices do not point to a simple 'securitization' process of 'the other ethnicity' under the condition of anarchy, as argued in the SSD literature. Rather, it is the self-and-other construction process under the condition of uncertainty, which itself was created by the very same people constructing ethnic identities. The Women's Parliament declaration on 20 May 1992 clearly highlighted this: 'it all began with "sweet" stories about national states, national rights, life within ethnic boundaries etc. The spectre of nationalism was thus woken up. A state of general uncertainty, endangerment and mistrust was created. Paranoia has become our everyday reality.'<sup>37</sup> While the nationalist political actors were creating this type of uncertainty, they presented themselves as the protectors: 'With us, there is no uncertainty' (governing Serbian Socialist Party's election slogan). With this motto, they not only identify themselves as the security provider, but also state that they provide security only to those who identify themselves as 'Serb'. This reflects McSweeney's argument: 'the security problem is not there just because people have separate identities; it may well be the case that they have separate identities because of the security problem'.<sup>38</sup> While state elites told societies what to value, what is worth securing, they also told them who they are and what they should do to secure who they are.

The consequence of this process can be easily traced in women's stories from all around Yugoslavia about their 'ethnic awareness'. Indira from Belgrade said that 'I grew up in a mixed family, both ethnically and religiously. When I came to Belgrade, I didn't have problems talking about myself with people. But when the war broke out, I became aware of my nationality'.<sup>39</sup> Many women were forced to identify themselves with their 'real ethnic origin'. A woman from Sarajevo in Germany told her story to *Women in Black*: 'Many of us who consider ourselves Yugoslavs don't dare say what we are and how we feel. We have been forced to declare ourselves on the basis of the origin of our names.'<sup>40</sup>

The process of the demotion of Yugoslav identity by the republics' ruling elites, however, was resisted by the Yugoslav feminists:

Before we were Yugoslavs and therefore never really identified with Serbs at all. At this point when we are forced to take a Serbian nationality as our own, we see that there is nothing, but nothing at all that can attract feminists to accept it as their own national identity.<sup>41</sup>

If we close our analytical scope to these experiences, it is likely that we will concur on the idea of 'elite manipulation of ethnic differences' or on 'securitization of the other ethnic groups' in the SSD literature. However, the political elite did not manipulate ethnic differences; rather, it created ethnic differences and constructed 'the threatening other'. This is related to 'what's bad about security', *if* security is conceptualized in a way that constructs dichotomist identities. In this process, women were extensively victimized. Studying their insecurities will help us understand their conception of security.

*Women's Insecurities in Former Yugoslavia*

As discussed above, feminist movements' perception and analysis of the civil war rests on the argument that nationalist political elites and intelligentsia constructed dichotomist political identities along ethnic lines. According to them, societies in former Yugoslavia should value the purity of their ethnic identities. These involve components from blood to language; what are worth securing are their ethnic nations. They presented themselves as the true saviours and protectors of their respective 'nations'. In this section, it will be examined how nationalist political elites constructed collective ethnic identities *through* constructing a particular identity for women. It will be argued that the gendered identity imposed on women in former Yugoslavia created a multidimensional victimhood.

The triangle between patriarchy, militarism and nationalism has been extensively studied by students of feminist security studies.<sup>42</sup> In brief, three ideologies about individual/male and female, nation/community construct political structures where women *should* adopt a certain identity that is essential for the survival of the 'nation'. Cynthia Cockburn defines the triangle accurately:

Patriarchy, nationalism and militarism are a kind of mutual admiration society. Nationalism is in love with patriarchy because patriarchy offers it women who will breed true little patriots. Militarism is in love with patriarchy because its women offer up their sons to be soldiers. Patriarchy is in love with nationalism and militarism because they produce unambiguously masculine men.<sup>43</sup>

In former Yugoslavia, the mutual admiration society became so effective that it victimized women on several levels.

First, women became a primary subject of the nationalist security policies in all Yugoslavian republics. In each republic, the nationalist elite disseminated a type of discourse telling women who they actually are, what their roles are and what they should value: not being an autonomous woman who has full discretion over her body and her lifestyle, but a bearer of defenders of the nation; a mother of young soldiers. Anti-war feminist movements rightfully claimed that the mutually constitutive relationship between militarism and patriarchy victimized women by limiting their choices to being mothers of the nation. As early as 1991, they stated that:

the militarization of former Yugoslavia has meant the imposition of military values and militaristic language; a cult of necrophilia; and acceptance of political and moral totalitarianism. Along with this ideological shift has come a rigid separation of masculine and feminine roles and political marginalization of women . . . Maternity is now to be seen as an obligation, not as a free option for women; the sexuality of women has to be controlled and reduced to procreation.<sup>44</sup>

Second, women became one of the main targets of the aggressors from all sides. Their goal was to spoil the bodies of possible mothers of the other ethnic group through the

method of rape. Dominant nationalist discourse equalized the women of the respective groups with their territory, land and country. An illustration of this understanding can be observed in the following wartime statement: 'The rape of a Croat woman stood for the rape of Croatia.'<sup>45</sup> Women in Black identified rape as 'a method of cleansing' where the geographic territory of 'the Other' ethnic group is conflated with the wombs of the Other's women: 'intrusion into the territory of the enemy nation'.<sup>46</sup> In the war game played by the men, women's bodies are considered as possessions of the male enemy; their violation means victory against the Other. Hansen explains this rationality as follows:

the rapes highlighted the importance of gender at the same time as they invested the two national communities with particular constructions of feminine and masculine identity. Through raping 'the other nation's women' the goal was to install a disempowered masculinity within the nation's men, as illustrated by the Serbian idea that an impregnated woman was a passive container carrying a child of the rapist's nationality.<sup>47</sup>

In former Yugoslavia, rape served three purposes: (a) destroying the 'guardians' or 'defenders' of the other ethnic groups, (b) conquering the enemy nation's 'territory' by becoming the owner of the child she is carrying, (c) humiliating the enemy males by taking their 'possessions' and 'ruining' them.

The third source of victimhood for women in former Yugoslavia was that dissident women who were resisting the identity and roles imposed on them by the nationalist/patriarchal discourse were targeted in a similar way to 'the Other ethnic groups' were targeted. The women's groups which claimed that women have full rights over their body, including the right to choose abortion, were primary targets. From 1991 onwards, mainly in Slovenia and Serbia, anti-abortion movements became powerful especially with the support of religious authorities.<sup>48</sup> The dissident women were considered as 'the enemy within' and 'traitors'. A church official, for example, reacted to the feminist groups by stating that 'these are enemies of the Serbian people'.<sup>49</sup> Marian Swindell explained this targeting as follows: 'the underlying sentiment here is that abortion is wrong, solely because it deprives the nation of future soldiers, who in later years, will go into war and possibly lose their life at that time'.<sup>50</sup> Another type of reaction which targeted the anti-war feminist movements was that women who joined the protests were identified as those who 'deserve' to be violated (read: to be raped) by the 'enemy'. For instance, a Serbian official in 1991 explicitly stated that the Women in Black 'can go to Croatia to be violated by the Croatian army'.<sup>51</sup> Unlike the case above, the Serbian men were not offended by this raping because these women were not considered differently from women of other ethnic groups.

Fourth, the civil war accelerated violence towards women. In this type of violence, 'the gender otherness precedes the nationalist otherness'.<sup>52</sup> Women subjected to domestic violence generally belonged to the same ethnicity as the aggressors, the men. In the late 1980s, feminist volunteers launched a helpline called SOS for women subjected to all types of violence. According to their experiences, TV shows that aired

dead bodies of citizens and atrocities conducted by ‘the enemy’ triggered domestic violence. An activist from SOS highlighted:

some women told us that husbands beat them up for the first time in their lives after one of these TV shows, or husbands went to search long hidden pistols in the cupboards, or they screamed at the Enemy screaming at their wives. In the home, vengeance against the declared enemy is impossible, so men have to substitute the Enemy. And usually the archetype of the man’s enemy is his legal wife.<sup>53</sup>

In a panel in 1997, Lepa Mladjrnovic reflected on what happened during the civil war:

war provokes violence against women. There are numerous examples of men who began beating their wives once the war began ... Militaristic values are strengthened by men fulfilling a warrior role. They prove themselves in this role, also through violence against women.<sup>54</sup>

However, this insecurity has so far escaped the security analyses of the Yugoslav civil war, although the victimhood points out how patriarchy and nationalism interact not only at state level but also at societal level, blurring the boundaries between the public and the private.

Four types of victimhood point to the insecurities women suffered due to the nationalist elites’ identity construction attempts. These insecurities transcend the traditional boundaries between ‘ethnic groups’. While all women in a community were deprived of the right to make free choices about their physical bodies and identities, those who resisted were subjected to exclusion and ‘othering’ processes. Those who did not resist were also subjected to insecurity as part of the generalized violence spreading from the frontlines to their houses. These insecurities of women tell us about the structure of war that cannot be said by those security analyses focusing exclusively on the security of ethnic groups, as defined by state-level elites. It is crucial to understand them because these insecurities illustrate the gendered relationships that contributed and sustained the militaristic/nationalist security ideas and policies in former Yugoslavia. In other words, the consequences of ‘what’s bad about security’ are made visible. However, there are also sources which shape what Yugoslav feminists think of security. The last section will discuss the security ideas of anti-war feminist movements in former Yugoslavia.

### *Feminist Movements’ Security Thinking: From the Individual Identity to the Collective Identity*

The complex victimhood of women discussed above reveals that particular security ideas and policies employed by the nationalist elites generated insecurities for women who resisted these policies. By resisting the identity imposed on them, the resistance also discarded the political ideas of the nationalist groups about what is worth securing in dissolving Yugoslavia. Instead, they employed their own ideas about the

security–identity nexus. They adopted particular strategies in parallel with these ideas, which cannot be studied by security analyses characterized by state-centrism and security professionalism. The women were victims of 'what's bad about security'. However, their victimhood was not defined in terms of passivity, lack of agency and powerlessness. On the fifth anniversary of the first protest of Women in Black, it was declared that 'we wanted to re-establish trust as soon as possible; through letters, small encounters, large international meetings. We attempted to create a space for stating and recognizing differences.'<sup>55</sup> Between the lines of this statement lies the possibility to explore 'what's good about security'.

The hub of anti-war feminist movements' security ideas was that the insecurities of women in former Yugoslavia could not be thought of independently from the insecurities of communities created by nationalist and militarist political groups. These movements problematized militarism and nationalism since they considered them as collaborators of patriarchy. They stated in 1994 that:

the institutional manifestations of the growing militarization are the increasing number of regular and paramilitary units, the enormous military budget, the wartime economy, whereas the promotion of militaristic values, symbols and language, necrophilia, mystification of death, the strict division into female and male roles and the political marginalization of women are its ideological manifestations.<sup>56</sup>

Following from this idea, the security understanding of feminist groups does not reduce the security problem in former Yugoslavia to insecurities of ethnic groups. Instead, insecurity is considered as a multidimensional phenomenon going beyond the simplistic explanations of war in terms of ethnic differences. Addressing the insecurities of women created by patriarchy also means addressing insecurities created by nationalism and militarism. In this understanding, a security policy does not mean forming a huge military budget, buying new weapons, creating, excluding and eventually destroying 'the Other'. Rather, empowering women constitutes a security policy because it is a panacea of militarism and nationalism. One of the participants of a workshop organized by Women in Black in Belgrade in 1997 highlighted the importance of the empowerment of women:

Militarization is performed via numerous institutions and mechanisms. The media and the entire educational system reduce women to the 'weaker sex', thus implying a need for us to be 'protected'. They instil fear to control us more easily. Through us, women, the authorities strengthen militarism. We supposedly cannot face difficult situations, we justify all forms of violence and machismo: we justify the military in war and we justify the police because with their protection, we ostensibly feel safe from attacks by delinquents.<sup>57</sup>

By declaring women as the guardians of their ethnic nations and equating their bodies with the land, the nationalist/militarist approach imposed a particular task on men: protect the women/the land/the blood. One of the most important strategies of the feminist security approach was to reject the identity imposed on women by the nationalist elites. To this aim, in August 1991, several thousands of mothers from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia gathered in front of the General Headquarters of the Yugoslav National Army. In one of the speeches, women explicated their resistance to the identity and roles imposed on them by the nationalist elites. They

rejected the traditional roles assigned to them by the patriarchal system: the martyr, who cries for her sons within the four walls of her home, with her neighbours, and at the graveside; and the heroine who sheds no tears, not even at the graveside.<sup>58</sup>

Rejecting this identity, feminist movements argued for a different identity for women: a woman who is politically active and free to make her own choices and who does not desperately need 'security' provided by men. For this woman, security means having freedom of choice. This freedom, however, is not limited to women only. They argue that all communities in former Yugoslavia should have freedom of choice between different ideas, visions and perspectives represented in the political arena. To this aim, they try to accomplish three objectives.

First, anti-war feminist movements try to broaden the political arena beyond the Parliament and beyond the discourses and activities of dominant political elites. In 1997, feminists stated that:

we want to change what's happening in Parliament, but politics is not only what's happening in Parliament. In a certain sense, this is a marked change in the relation toward politics. Political parties believe that only they carry out politics, while everything else is social bodies. The feminist movement is indeed political.

They also have different ideas about how to conduct politics. They stated that:

politics is not only gaining power and winning elections. There are also new forms of communication. The way in which we exist is changing politics ... the fact that we are here, that we are together, having crossed borders, encouraging one another, is indeed an attempt to change politics.<sup>59</sup>

Although these movements were marginalized as apolitical by their competitors in the political system, security analyses of the Yugoslav civil war have contributed to this marginalization by neglecting feminist movements' conception of politics due to their state-centrism and security professionalism. This results in an incomplete representation of the pluralism of the politics of security. As a consequence, the



concept of security is reduced to exclusion, destruction and oppression. In contrast, anti-war feminist movements have different security strategies.

One of the most important strategies of the anti-war feminist movement was listening to those who were presented as 'the Others' by the nationalist elites. Both during and after the war, feminist movements continuously organized workshops and seminars where women were invited from all around Yugoslavia. The reason for this political action was explained as follows: 'we know that every war destroys the conditions conducive to listening to the other's story. By losing his/her individuality, the Other becomes a threat, responsible for the whole collective story rather than for individual actions.'<sup>60</sup> They specifically brought refugees from all sides of the fighting to make the point that the pain and suffering of women and men does not change depending on nationality. In 1991, Svetlana Marikovic from Women in Black asked 'do we know how many refugees "from the other side" have been deprived of everything which constitutes a normal life in the same way as "our" refugees?'<sup>61</sup> Knowing the Other's story is an assault against the nationalist identity politics through generation of empathy between individuals and groups. This is because only through empathy people can realize how their ethnocentric security policies create pain and suffering for others.<sup>62</sup>

Anti-war feminist movements' main answer to the question of what is worth securing is that common life, where differences coexist equally, should be secured. While they were refusing the individual role/identity imposed on them by the nationalist elites, feminists were also telling alternative stories about collective identities in their societies. Jelka Imsirovic and Nadezja Cetkovic from Belgrade Women's Lobby in August 1991 highlighted what is worth securing in Yugoslavia:

Even after this war all the ethnic groups, members of various religious groups, of different political choices etc. will have to live together in this land. The war will darken the future even for our grandchildren. Common life is possible. The differences between us are our richness.<sup>63</sup>

Stasa Zajovic concurred that 'patriarchal fraternity pretends to value differences, while we women strive for equality within differences'.<sup>64</sup> Different identities are not necessarily a source of insecurity. Unlike the nationalist security–identity discourse, feminist security discourse prioritizes the idea of a common identity in which equality of differences is upheld.

The discussion above contains claims about how we, as students of CSS, can explore 'what's good about security'. Ontologically, the key step can be broadening the politics of security to include the resistance to state-centric ideas and practices. Feminist movements in former Yugoslavia desperately tried to overcome political marginalization, which also included no media coverage of their activities. Critical approaches to security can include resistance in their analyses and, therefore, loosen the long forged connection between the concept of security and the institution of the state. A more comprehensive and pluralistic examination of the politics of security can lead to discovering different ideas about the security–identity nexus, which have developed within the historical, political and social context of the case under examination.

Epistemologically, what we know about the security–identity nexus can be expanded beyond the knowledge generated with reference to dominant political actors and security professionals. Critical approaches to security in general, and post-modernist approaches in particular, have so far problematized how security can become a powerful word to construct identities and be converted into an oppressive tool to govern social groups by dominant political actors, mainly states. Our knowledge about ‘what’s bad about security’ has immensely improved in the last decades. However, this is partial knowledge that reflects only one dimension of the politics of security. In order to launch an analysis that examines the multidimensionality of the politics of security, critical approaches to security can include the experiences, ideas and practices of the most victimized groups. As shown in the case of the anti-war feminist movements, victimized groups tell different stories about what we should value and what is worth securing. They generate their own security ideas, which include freedom of choice for individuals and equality between different groups. Their security practices are diverse: bringing the women of conflicting sides together, generating empathy by revealing the Other’s suffering, hiding deserters and, maybe most importantly, re-empowering the most victimized. This does not mean that all these practices are inherently good or successful (in many workshops organized by Women in Black, some participants had quarrels about who suffered ‘the most’). Without attaching universal meanings to these ideas and practices, critical approaches to security can create knowledge about these ideas and practices in their own historical, political and social contexts. An answer to ‘what’s good about security’ can be sought out in this knowledge.

## Conclusion

This analysis is an attempt to think about the concept of security not from the perspective of states and security professionals, but from the perspective of marginalized women’s groups in former Yugoslavia. In this way, an answer to the question of ‘what’s good about security’ is framed.

Women’s victimhood in former Yugoslavia highlighted more than what the traditional security approaches have said so far, that is, violence between groups with different ethnic identities. In contrast, they reveal how particular political groups construct ethnic identities through imposing a certain type of identity on women and men. Through this construction process, they gained political power by presenting themselves as protectors of their respective ethnic groups in an uncertain period when the central Yugoslav government was disempowered by the elites of the Yugoslav states. In this uncertain period, they formed narratives about what people should value, who they really are and what is worth securing. In contrast, anti-war feminist movements resisted this process by rejecting the normative judgements of nationalist political elites. Their alternative was to value equality of differences and a common life worth securing. In this security understanding, inclusion rather than exclusion, creation rather than destruction, life rather than death were upheld. Nevertheless, these ideas about security have so far continuously escaped security analyses.

## Acknowledgements

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## Notes

- [1] Emancipatory security theory and some works created within feminist security theory can be differentiated from other CSS approaches in terms of their parallel (but not always mutually acknowledged) reconceptualizations of security in more positive terms, for example, see Ken Booth, 'Security and emancipation', *Review of International Studies*, 17(4), 1991, pp. 313–326; Ken Booth (ed.), 'Beyond critical security studies', in *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, CO, 2005, pp. 259–278; Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007. For feminist reconceptualization, see J. Ann Tickner, *Gender in International Relations: Feminist Perspectives on Achieving International Security*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1992; J. Ann Tickner, 'Feminist responses to international security studies', *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, 16(1), 2004, pp. 43–48.
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- [16] This section is a revised version of Ali Bilgic, *Rethinking Security in the Age of Migration: Trust and Emancipation in Europe*, Routledge, London, 2013, pp. 6–7.
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